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SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/PD, AF/W, AF/RA, IIP/G/AF, IIP/T/G
USAID/W FOR AFR, G/PHN (DELAY)
DEPARTMENT PASS TO IBB FOR VOA (ENGLISH TO AFRICA
SERVICE, HAUSA SERVICE)
EMBASSIES AND CONSULATES FOR PAS, POL, ECON,
USAID

E.O. 12598: N/A

TAGS: [KHIV](#) [KPAO](#) [OIIP](#) [SCUL](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: THE A-B-C-D OF AIDS -- NIGERIAN
WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS WANT MORE ON "A,"
ABSTINENCE, AND MORE ON "B," BE FAITHFUL

11. SUMMARY: Nigerians who focus on the HIV/AIDS epidemic use A-B-C-D (A-Abstain, B-Be faithful, C-use Condoms, OR D-you Die) as a mnemonic device with target audiences. Sixty activists and program leaders -- Muslim and Christian -- who attended one of the two two-day workshops in Kaduna and Lagos with U.S. Speaker Rev. Eugene Rivers listened with rapt attention and growing enthusiasm to his presentations on the U.S. experience with faith-based programs that promote abstinence and fidelity. They unanimously asked for more focus, more programs, and more tools to promote the "A" and "B" in the formula -- abstinence and fidelity.

12. Attending all of the sessions at the workshop in Lagos was the First Lady of Cross River State. A Reuters cameraman from Abidjan taped some of Rivers' presentations in Lagos for a possible segment on "Sixty Minutes." This is a GPRA report. END SUMMARY.

13. The PAS sections in Abuja and Lagos organized two-day workshops for visiting U.S. speaker Boston-based Rev. Eugene Rivers, pastor of the Azuza Christian Community and co-chair of the National TenPoint Coalition. AIDS activists and program leaders, with a strong representation of pastors and imams, gathered in Kaduna on June 3-4 and in Lagos on June 6-7. The programs -- "Faith-Based Approaches to Combat HIV-AIDS: Focus on Abstinence and Fidelity" also provided an excellent introduction to the Bush Administration's initiatives with faith-based programs. The sessions were attended by every invitee, with not even one no-show.

14. Rivers, an energetic and convictional teacher who alternates between the languages of the university classroom and the pulpit, first framed the HIV/AIDS epidemic in an unaccustomed way, avoiding polite circumlocutions. It is a "sexual holocaust" that will produce 40 million orphans and untold social disruption across the continent unless radical changes in the behavior that communicates the disease -- he bluntly called it "promiscuity" -- occur, especially among African men who exploit the continent's women and girls. Newborns infected with AIDS may be a new "biological underclass."

15. In Rivers' view, the epidemic is not simply medical. It is also a human rights issue: men who infect women are committing fatal violations of their human rights. And it has a moral dimension because the behavior that will reverse the rise in HIV/AIDS incidence -- fidelity in marriage, abstinence before marriage -- must be grounded in deeper understandings of human sexuality, dignity, and respect. Faith communities, he said, are best positioned to teach the underlying values that can change behavior.

16. Each audience -- mostly Muslim in Kaduna, mostly Christian in Lagos -- had issues to dispel before Rivers could get to the heart of his program. In the north, the chairman of the Jaamat Nazrili Islam used his welcoming remarks to re-air the rumors that the AIDS virus had been

developed in U.S. labs and say that it was necessary to understand the true origins of the virus before deciding on how to approach the epidemic. He also said "the U.S. has never officially denied this." After the PAO emphatically stated the denial for the record, explaining some of the Cold War disinformation that set the rumor in motion, Rivers suggested that dwelling on the origins of disease was a distraction or excuse that could only delay the immediate imperative -- to deal with the epidemic. Delay would cost many more lives.

17. Other audience members said the way to end the epidemic was to attack its true "root causes" -- poverty, or the status of women, or crushing external debts, or lack of education, for instance. Rivers agreed that all these issues must be addressed, but he said there was no time to wait for root causes to be solved. This focus was a distraction or an excuse for no action. The immediate prospect of death for so many millions required immediate, direct action.

(In Lagos, participants told Rivers that the current rumor circulating among young people is that the U.S. wants to use the AIDS epidemic to keep Africans from having sex. Rivers urged all the participants to fight this rumor. Young people who acted on it would only increase the risks of their own infection and death.)

18. Some participants voiced doubt that the experience of a pastor in a U.S. inner city was relevant to the different circumstances of Nigeria, but Rivers deeply impressed them with parallels. Both countries confront the ubiquity of upfront sexuality in popular music and culture, the absence of fathers that can foster inappropriate and risky behavior in adolescent daughters and sons, and generational discontinuities that pull children away from traditional norms that were still strong during the upbringings of today's adults. He strongly urged the participants to "dialog with the culture" and learn how to communicate with young people if they are to be successful.

19. Joining the workshop in Kaduna during a session on its second day was Dr. Danny McCain, an American faculty member in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Jos. (All primary and secondary students in Nigeria take "Christian Religious Knowledge" or "Islamic Religious Knowledge" as a required course.) The Religious Studies department at the university trains teachers in these subjects for primary and secondary schools. The Muslim and Christian faculty at the Department worked together to develop two exactly parallel AIDS awareness syllabi for high school religious studies classes. The learning outcomes and lesson sequences are identical for both the Christian and Islamic syllabi; the only difference is the references to verses in the Bible or the Koran. McCain shared the faculty's commitment to education for abstinence and fidelity as the behavioral premises of the program.

110. Materials provided by Rivers for the conference were all new to the participants. They included the 1999 four-part series on AIDS in Africa that ran in the Boston Globe; the recent New Republic article ("Uganda v. Condoms: Sex Change," by Arthur Allen, issue of May 27, 2000); and The Seymour Institute report, "Recommendations for Addressing the AIDS Holocaust in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1/2002." The IRCs added more material, including the Heritage Foundation 5/2002 report on abstinence programs that research has proven effective in reducing sexual activity among young people.

111. The final sessions of the workshops were devoted to brainstorming. The Nigerian participants proved eager to: begin developing awareness campaigns and workshops; develop community-based non-academic approaches and materials; train trainers; develop effective communications; and put together an advocacy

network to promote abstinence and fidelity.

¶12. In addition to the workshops, Rivers held media roundtables in Lagos and Abuja. The National Television Authority and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria aired spots of the Kaduna session -- one ran seven minutes. Reports were printed over the weekend in two newspapers -- The Guardian (establishment, Lagos) and Al-Mizan. The latter is a radical Islamic paper published in Zaria that circulates to Mosque congregations on Friday. The report of the Rivers program was the first favorable report on the U.S. in the newspaper in recent memory.

¶13. At a dinner with Rivers, the Methodist bishop of Kaduna confessed that he has never met an AIDS patient, and the dinner table conversation about the coming crisis of millions of orphans in Africa was the first time he had considered this need for enlarged social work. (He said the two Methodist orphanages in Nigeria have a capacity of a few hundred, and it is already a financial challenge to maintain them. To his knowledge, these are the only Christian orphanages in the country.)

¶14. "Sixty Minutes" arranged for the Reuters office in Abidjan to send a cameraman to tape Rivers' initial workshop sessions on Thursday, June 6. The cameraman did not interview Rivers, the participants, or any Consulate staff. Action for this project at "Sixty Minutes" is Dana Miller.

¶15. GPRA data:

RESULTS: Excellent. Participants rated the workshops as highly successful and left full of information and energy to strengthen the "abstinence" and "be faithful" portions of their own programs. The fortuitous attendance of Dr. McCain allowed them to be updated on one Nigerian effort that is already underway. Fresh materials provided by Rev. Rivers and the IRC added new knowledge and perspectives. The participation of Muslim and Christian leaders, focusing on a common problem, was an additional positive dimension of the program.

DATE: June 3-7, 2002, FY 2002, third quarter.

MPP UMBRELLA THEMES: Health

AUDIENCE REACHED: Sixty HIV/AIDS activists and program leaders drawn from both Nigeria's north and south. Attending all the sessions in Lagos over two days was the First Lady of Cross River State.

NON-USG FUNDING: N/A.

QUALITY OF U.S. SUPPORT: Excellent. Thanks to William Peters of IIP for making travel arrangements for Rev. Rivers on short notice.

Andrews